

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8509
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UNCLAS DUBLIN 2263

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EI
SUBJ: RESIGNATION OF IRELAND'S PRESIDENT O ODALAIIGH

REF: DUBLIN 2227

1. IN WHAT WAS INSTANTLY LABELLED AS A "POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE," IRELAND'S PRESIDENT CEARBHAILL O DALAIGH RESIGNED EFFECTIVE 6:00 P.M. TODAY, OCTOBER 22. THE RESIGNATION IS APPARENTLY THE DIRECT RESULT OF AN INSULT BY DEFENSE MINISTER DONEGAN WHO EARLIER THIS WEEK LABELLED O DALAIGH A "THUNDERING DISGRACE" (REFTEL). THE IRISH CONSTITUTION PROVIDES THAT THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PRESIDENT BE TAKEN OVER BY A COMMISSION WHICH CONSISTS OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE AND THE SPEAKER OF THE LOWER HOUSE. ELECTIONS MUST TAKE PLACE WITHIN SIXTY DAYS, UNLESS THERE IS ONLY ONE CANDIDATE WHO IS ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES.

2. IT IS KNOWN THAT O DALAIGH WAS HIGHLY INSULTED BY THE DONEGAN ATTACK, BELIEVING THAT THE EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF HIS OFFICE HAD BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION.

3. THE COALITION GOVERNMENT RELEASED A SIMPLE STATEMENT THAT IT HAD LEARNED WITH "DEEP REGRET" OF THE RESIGNATION OF UNCLASSIFIED

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THE PRESIDENT. FIANNA FAIL OPPOSITION LEADER JACK LYNCH

STATED THAT THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT O DALAIGH IS THE "SAD OUTCOME OF THE UNDERMINING OF THE PRESIDENCY AND THE FAILURE OF THE GOVERNMENT TO UPHOLD THE DIGNITY OF THE NATION'S HIGHEST OFFICE."

4. COMMENT: POLITICAL COMMENTATORS BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT MADE A SERIOUS BLUNDER IN FAILING TO FIRE DEFENSE MINISTER DONEGAN FOR HIS INSULT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE PRESIDENT HELD BACK HIS RESIGNATION UNTIL AFTER THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE GENERATED BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S COMMENT. IT IS QUITE LIKELY THAT PRESIDENT O DALAIGH WAS HOPING THE DEBATE WOULD HAVE PRODUCED SOMETHING MORE CONCRETE FROM THE GOVERNMENT THAN SIMPLE EXPRESSIONS OF REGRET AND THE REFUSAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO DISMISS THE OFFENDING CABINET MINISTER.

5. INITIAL REACTION INDICATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION WILL LIKELY BE UNABLE TO AGREE ON A NEW CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT, WHICH WOULD MEAN THAT THERE MUST BE AN ELECTION WITHIN SIXTY DAYS. O DALAIGH HIMSELF CAME TO OFFICE AS THE AGREED CANDIDATE BETWEEN THE PARTIES IN DECEMBER 1974. RANCOR BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION OVER THE DONEGAN EPISODE AND THE EMERGENCY POWERS LEGISLATION LAST MONTH PRACTICALLY PRECLUDES AGREEMENT ON A CANDIDATE. BASED ON EARLY READING, POLITICAL COMMENTATORS THINK IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL RESIGN AND CALL FOR EARLY GENERAL ELECTIONS BECAUSE THE EMBARRASSMENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION WOULD OBVIOUSLY BE TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE RULING COALITION PARTIES.

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